

**Remarks of
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to the
FLORIDA TRUCKING ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
NAPLES, FLORIDA
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On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, I want to thank you for inviting me to visit with you today. This is a challenging and rewarding time in transportation, and I believe that working together we're improving safety, mobility and the economy.

Transportation Moving the Economy

While safety is our primary mission at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, getting the economy moving has always been, and remains, a top priority for the President and his entire team.

Our nation's economy is strong and getting stronger. We've had steady job growth for the last 10 months. We've added more than 1.5 million new jobs. We're witnessing steady, consistent growth.

We're seeing the economy's impact on commerce as well. The U.S. transportation system annually carries more than 16.3 billion tons of freight — valued at over \$12 trillion. And, as the economy continues to take off, we project freight volume will increase by more than 50 percent in the next 20 years. While this growth is welcome, it brings with it a potential impact on safety. So we need to prepare.

Safety Goal

As I said, safety is at the very HEART of our mission at the U.S. Department of transportation and FMCSA. In 2003 we lost more than 43,000 people on our nation's highways. Of that 43,000, nearly 5,000 deaths were related to commercial motor vehicles. We were very encouraged by a steady decrease in truck-related fatalities from 1997 to 2002. However, the preliminary 2003 highway crash statistics showed a slight rise in these fatalities.

It's a sobering reminder of the hard work ahead of us. USDOT has a commitment to reduce the fatality rate in all motor vehicle crashes by 41 percent from 1996 to 2008. To reach this goal, we must take new approaches that help improve safety and security nationwide. And we must work with all of you in the States to reduce highway fatalities.

Hours of Service

I'd like to turn first to the new Hours of Service rules. The new rule improves drivers' opportunity to get rest, so they can be alert and drive safely. We estimate these safety improvements will save up to 75 lives and prevent as many as 1,326 fatigue-related crashes annually. And, we estimate they will save the American economy \$628 million a year.

At FMCSA we *are* sensitive to the various challenges these new rules present to motor carriers and drivers. Every new rule and regulation prompts a period of adjustment, and we're trying to work through continued concerns about parts of these rules. Feedback we've received from carriers, shippers and drivers indicate unanticipated efficiencies are occurring in the loading and unloading of freight. Additional comments reflect motor carrier and driver desire to understand and comply with the rules.

We are reviewing petitions on HOS in several areas now. That will help us to determine next steps. We realize the HOS rules directly impact the way you run your operations. If you have questions or concerns, please let us know. We are committed to working with you to make the HOS rules as effective as possible.

NAFTA

I'd like to say a few words about the North American Free Trade Agreement. Trade is a key component of President Bush's strategy for continuing to build a strong economy that creates even more jobs. And the Administration feels very strongly that NAFTA is vitally important to our nation's commerce and our economy.

While only four States in the Southwest share a border with Mexico, NAFTA impacts the whole country. Opening the market between Mexico and the United States for trucks and buses means *more opportunities* for American companies, *more jobs* for American drivers and *better deals* for American consumers.

Yet we have to be mindful of safety concerns and the need to hold motor carriers, drivers and trucks from Mexico and Canada to our own high standards. And we are. In March 2002, FMCSA published rules that set standards for Mexican motor carrier operations within the US beyond the commercial zones near the border.

In anticipation of the opening of the southern border, we have established a system for Mexican carriers to apply for operating authority within the U.S. Mexican carriers must demonstrate their compliance with ALL FMCSA safety regulations, and border inspections will ensure that they meet our standards. Each carrier that qualifies will be assigned a distinct DOT number for operating beyond the 20-mile commercial zone.

The Bush Administration remains firmly committed to implementing the trucking and bus provisions of NAFTA.

New Entrants

There are three initiatives I also want to mention today involving changes that directly impact your operations. The first is New Entrants. This program is mandated by statute.

It is vitally important to prepare New Entrants to trucking for safe and compliant operations. New motor carriers will be subject to an 18-month safety-monitoring period upon registering with FMCSA. All new carriers will receive a safety audit and have their roadside crash and inspection information closely evaluated. They must demonstrate that they are able to ensure basic safety management.

This is critical, considering more than 40,000 to 50,000 new carriers are entering interstate commerce each year. We continually look for ways to improve the program, both administratively and operationally, and seek your input in doing so. Six States — including Florida — have chosen not to participate at this time. We are working with them as we proceed to implement the program. In the interim we are exploring the use of third-party contractors in the six non-participating States.

Data Quality

The second initiative is data improvement. Our enforcement efforts rely heavily on high-quality data to better identify high-risk motor carriers for investigation. Our objective here is to order poor and non-compliant safety performers out of service BEFORE they cause harm. The more complete, timely and accurate our data is — and the more efficient our data collection and access systems are — the better our ability to PREVENT violations and crashes.

Improving data poses many challenges. It requires a commitment by the industry, enforcement personnel and Federal agencies to ensure the data upon which we base our decisions is accurate and timely.

One of our primary tools for analyzing data — the Motor Carrier Safety Status Measurement System, or SafeStat — is only as good as the data it uses. By using a carrier's crash, inspection, enforcement, compliance review, and out-of-service data, it accurately identifies carriers that pose the greatest risk to safety.

However, it can be even better. Recently we assessed the quality of State safety data quality based on the timeliness, accuracy and completeness of crash and inspection information. Florida, I am happy to say, does an excellent job. Your state now uploads vehicle inspections twice as fast as the national average and matches them to the proper carrier at a rate 25 percent better than average. And, we want to work with Florida to improve the timeliness of crash data. Many other States must make significant improvements in these areas, and we're working with them to improve their data collection and reporting.

Additionally, we are looking at ways to improve the quality and timeliness of safety performance data within our own operations. We are particularly concerned about the crash data since it has great impact on carriers. We have decided to temporarily remove the Accident Safety Evaluation Area, or SEA, and the overall SafeStat scores from our Web site. This will provide time for the accuracy and timeliness of crash reports to be improved.

The Accident SEA and SafeStat scores will be reposted as soon as we know the supporting data is accurate and uploaded on a timely basis. Carriers will still be able to access their own Accident SEA and overall scores in the interim. I encourage you to help us in this effort by working with the State to ensure the data is correct and timely.

Compliance Reviews

The third initiative is a comprehensive self-examination of how we assess safety performance. This is an area where we really *need* and *want* your help. Although we have made great strides in safety, we still face some serious challenges.

The number of carriers — currently there are about 650,000 — continues to increase every year — a trend that will only accelerate as the economy continues to take off. The number of miles traveled by all carriers is likewise increasing — at a faster rate than passenger cars. There are additional requirements relating to New Entrants, tighter security following 9/11, and the opening of the Southern Border under NAFTA. And while the demands are rising, our resources are likely to remain flat. Obviously, we will have to work harder and smarter to continue our progress in improving safety.

Therefore, we must look at *every* tool in our toolbox — how we use them, how we can change them, and how we can add to them. The compliance review process consumes over 40 percent of our agency's staff time. It is the core of our enforcement program. We are very interested in reviewing the CR process as a key component in this effort. We need to explore ways to look at more carriers, more efficiently and produce a larger safety benefit. We must do this, additionally, in a very targeted way that's not intrusive to your business.

And we must ask ourselves the key question: Are we evaluating and measuring the right things? And, are those measurements a sound predictor of risk? While we don't yet have the solutions, we have a pretty good idea of how to approach the problem. We need to collect the right information in order to make smart decisions. Our aim is to reduce the amount of time we are in a carrier's place of business, while still looking at the appropriate safety areas.

Later this year, we plan to schedule several listening sessions across the country to seek input on answering these questions. I've already talked about the value of good data, and I think this will play a vitally important role in this initiative. I strongly encourage you to participate in these sessions. We hope this will help us move toward a rulemaking change on how we assess carrier fitness. This will be a great opportunity for you to help redesign our program to ensure it is even more effective in ensuring safety on our nation's highways.

Safety Belts

Finally, I'd like to talk about safety belts. In 2003, 58 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts. This underscores the value of the need for states to adopt standard safety belt laws.

The Bush Administration is proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 79 percent — the highest level ever. However, a recent study by our agency showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up.

So, last December, Secretary Mineta gathered with enforcement and trucking leaders to launch the broadest effort this country has ever seen to get truckers to wear their safety belts. And we kicked off start of the summer travel season with a \$30 million *Click It or Ticket* campaign — with a new partner, NASCAR.

This has been a very successful program. Last year, *Click It or Ticket* resulted in a four-percent nationwide increase in safety belt use. That's great news because it translates into about 1,000 lives saved. So, it's time for all drivers to buckle up.

Close

Together, we have a number of issues before us that call for clear and straightforward communications. Remember that working together, we can all improve safety, prevent crashes and save lives. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.